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SUBJECT: FRENCH INITIAL REACTION TO TERRORIST ATTACKS IN
LONDON

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Shared outrage and shock, and a renewed awareness of their own vulnerability, characterized French reaction to the terrorist bombings in the London transport system. Prime Minister Villepin wrote to Prime Minister Blair within an hour of the attacks to express France's solidarity with Britain and commitment to helping track down "the authors of these crimes." Villepin raised France's terrorism alert level. He met with Interior Minister Sarkozy, Defense Minister Alliot-Marie, Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy and the heads of France's intelligence services to discuss reinforcing anti-terrorism measures. Authorities stepped up security procedures at airports, and increased identity checks of passengers bound for London by rail. Prime Minister Blair's statement at the Gleneagles Summit (during which he was flanked by the G-8 leaders with Presidents Bush and Chirac immediately behind him) is receiving wide media play in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. The sentiments expressed by Prime Minister Blair -- determination to prevail in a struggle that must be fought together -- is receiving wide and approving media commentary. End Summary.

OPERATIONAL REACTION

2. (SBU) Prime Minister Villepin, informed of the London attack while he was defending a proposed law on the Senate floor, left immediately for an emergency meeting with Interior Minister Sarkozy, Defense Minister Alliot Marie, Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy and the heads of France's intelligence services. Villepin raised France's terrorism alert level from orange to red (France's four-color scale runs yellow/orange/red/scarlet). The raising of the alert level increases security personnel (including military personnel) at transportation hubs and other public sites. It also provides more leeway for conducting identity checks of air, rail, and road travelers. Patrols increased in Paris' subway system. The transportation ministry established a special monitoring and operations center and ordered reinforced passenger checks at airports and on trains bound for the UK.

RHETORICAL REACTION

3. (SBU) Villepin, within an hour of the attacks, wrote to Blair to express the "horror and profound sadness at these odious crimes" felt by the French people. In his letter to Blair, as in a televised statement, Villepin underlined France's commitment to continuous and full collaboration in searching for the perpetrators of these crimes. Villepin, in his televised statement, stated that he directed the Minister of the Interior (political rival Nicolas Sarkozy) to prepare options for such reinforcement of security as circumstances might warrant. Though Sarkozy will be in the media spotlight conducting inspections of police deployments and reporting to the public on Interior Ministry operations, Villepin in his statement clearly cast himself as personally in the lead directing the measures taken in reaction to the attacks.

4. (SBU) President Chirac, in a statement from the Gleneagles summit, declared his "horror" at the terrorist attacks, calling the acts "unspeakable" and expressing the "solidarity of all France." Mayor of Paris Bertrand Delanoë, upon arrival from Singapore (where Paris lost out to London as host city for the 2012 Summer Olympics) declared, "We are all Londoners now." The President of the French Council of the Muslim faith (CFCM) issued a statement strongly condemning the attacks, which "can in no way be justified by any connection to Islam or its values."

COMMENT

5. (SBU) Prime Minister Blair's statement from the Gleneagles summit -- flanked by all the G-8 leaders and with President Bush and President Chirac immediately behind him -- is regularly replayed in the French media's ongoing coverage of the aftermath of the attacks. Comment so far has been uniformly positive about Blair's framing of the issue as a struggle in which we are all engaged and in which we can only

prevail together. The French public is keenly aware of the near impossibility of defending a sprawling public transportation system against terrorist attack. The public is also keenly aware of France's large, and in some quarters disaffected, Muslim population. Apprehension runs high that such an attack could easily also happen in Paris, should a terrorist cell go undetected through the weeks of planning required. For the French public and government, the attacks in London are sure to spur renewed commitment to anti-terrorist vigilance and anti-terrorism cooperation. End Comment.
STAPLETON